

**Walter Johnson Cluster**  
**Testimony to the County Council on the MCPS Operating Budget**  
**April 7, 2010**

**Walter Johnson PTA Cluster**

Walter Johnson High School - North Bethesda Middle School - Tilden Middle School - Ashburton Elementary School - Farmland Elementary School - Garrett Park Elementary School - Kensington Parkwood Elementary School - Luxmanor Elementary School - Wyngate Elementary School

Good Evening members of the County Council. My name is Barbara Ferry and I am a Walter Johnson Cluster Coordinator, along with Jennifer Cope and DeeDee Jacobsohn. We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed MCPS Operating Budget and its effects on our cluster.

The impact of the economy on the county's budget is profound, but we ask you to take the long view required to maintain Montgomery County's successful educational reforms. We are concerned that you may decide to cut the Montgomery County Public Schools budget at a time when enrollment in WJ cluster is expanding due to increased development in our area. We ask you to hold the line on cuts.

Already the Superintendent's FY2011 budget recommendation is only a 1% increase over last year, which must fund a 2% increase in projected enrollment. The budget already includes no cost of living increases for teachers, hiring freezes and many spending restrictions. If MCPS does not receive local funding at the minimum Maintenance of Effort level, it will be necessary to consider significant service reductions including increasing class sizes, the loss of special program

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teachers and counselors, media assistants and certain positions within the Middle School Magnet Consortium.

The message is clear from our schools and parents – give us the funding to keep the class sizes in check by hiring enough teachers and providing them the support of paraeducators, media assistants, ESOL teachers, and others now threatened with job losses.

Increasing class size limits has unintended but real consequences This year, Luxmanor Elementary was required to create a combination 3rd/4th grade class even though they were over capacity in both of their 4th grade classes. Now, for next year, they must do a combination 4<sup>th</sup>/5th grade class even though again, they are over capacity in both 5th grade classes. The combo class makes the other on-grade classes even larger than capacity so that the combination class is smaller for the teacher teaching two grades. Students who are in upper grades in these combinations are teased and bullied by peers believing they are put into these classes because they are not as smart.

Other parts of the county's budget concern the WJ cluster. We object to the proposed cuts to the Police Department's Educational Facilities Officer program that will directly affect the safety of students in our middle and high schools. It was a quick-thinking EFO officer who identified drug deals being made outside Walter Johnson during lunch periods that led to the arrest of that dealer during this school year. The trust relationships that EFOs forge with students provide them with insights that would be difficult for a visiting officer to duplicate. EFOs also

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receive special training to serve as liaisons between the schools and the police departments.

There can be no doubt that the county's outstanding school system attracts both business and well-educated workers to our area, which in turn raises property values and fills county coffers with real estate and sales taxes. You may think a year or two on an austere budget is not much to ask during hard economic times. But we all deal with budgets in government and private industry and know that they rarely bounce back to pre-cutback levels immediately. Positions that were eliminated in this budget will not magically appear in the next. Before you know it, an entire high school class – from freshman to senior year -- is affected by what looks like just one- or two-year cuts.

Our county has an amazing record of sending one-half of our high school graduates to college, twice the national average – a rate that Dr. Weast points out will add an additional \$3 billion to the economy over the next 30 years. We ask you, the County Council, to take this same long view by providing the funds to MCPS to continue the excellence in Montgomery County education by not cutting the MCPS budget beyond the Superintendent's recommendations.